Culture of Automation in Postal Services

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Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that automation in the Department of Telecommunications is taken as a culture, more than the technology;

(b) if so, whether it is also a fact that inspite of automation in the postal services, the culture has not yet come;

(c) whether, inspite of computerisation in post offices, the same amount of time is required for getting jobs done because the culture of automation has not yet been imbibed; and

(d) if so, what steps are being taken to bring the culture of automation in the postal services?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SUKH RAM): (a) Culture and technology go hand in hand for effective results.

(b) to (d) Postal services are traditionally labour intensive. Post office counters and postal delivery require face to face contact which is difficult to replace with any type of automation. In the advanced Western countries, initial attempts for mechanisation and automation were made in the area of mail processing by use of high-speed automatic sorting machines.

Mechanisation in the Indian Postal Services during the last several decades concentrated on introduction of mechanical gadgets like tying and bundling machines, automatic stamp cancelling machines etc., to save drudgery in the work place. Serious attempts to bring in automation was made only in the late eightees and early nineties. After large scale availability and use of personal computers in several areas of work in the country, a special software was developed to make various postal services offered at the counters like booking of registered letters, Speed Post articles, money orders etc. processed in a system configuration of a personal computer, a weighing scale and a printer and provide a single-window service for all such servicies. Only 250 such integrated systems were introduced in the post offices during 1993-94. Since then, another 1600 such systems have been introduced till the end of 1994-95. The programme for 8th Five Year Plan is to introduce 5000 such computer based multi-Purpose Counter Machines. Considering the fact that there are more than 25,000 Departmental Post Offices in the country, introduction of 5,000 machines in more important offices is not likely to usher in a total transformation in the culture of the Department as a whole. With the availability of resources, most of the post offices are likely to be covered by this programme over a period of 10 years.

Automatic processing of mail for sorting requires several preparatory steps like standardization of stationery in regard to size, shape, texture, thickness, colour etc. One of the pre-requisites of automatic processing of mail is also use of a Postal Code. In the advanced Western Countries, in spite of all these preparatory work, a substantial percentage of mail are manually handled. In the Indian Postal Services, it was felt that such automatic processing will be cost-effective in large metro cities where there is a high volume of mail and likelihood of a large percentage of mail amenable to machine handling. In accordance with this policy, the first automatic mail processing centre was set up in Bombay in 1993 and the second such centre is likely to be commissioned in Madras during 1995-96. Considering the size of the country, a few such centres are not likely to totally change the methods of work adopted for mail processing but will take care of the bigger concentration points only.

The Postal Services in India are at a stage of familiarization with automation and has not reached the point of take-off. Studies made indicate that the productivity and output at the computerised counters is much greater than the manual counters. The same is the case also with the automatic processing of mail at Bombay. It is expected that with the use of more such machines and intensive training of the operative staff already embarked upon by the Department of Post, the culture of automation will spread in due course.